

Enhancing Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities:

By the year 2020, every work ready person with a disability will be employed.

February 2001

DOC
BC
S4923
D:E5
2001
c.3



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Social Development
and Economic Security

LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY
VICTORIA BC V8V 1X4 MAR 15 2001



Table of Contents

I Introduction	3
Why Disability Issues are Important	3
The Government's Eight-Point Plan	4
The Federal-Provincial-Territorial In Unison Process	4
Organization of this Report	5
2 The Challenge	6
Growing Numbers of People With Disabilities	
Need Financial Assistance	6
Lack of Labour Market Success	8
Barriers to Greater Participation	9
Labour Market Participation and Full Citizenship	10
Growing Labour Market Needs	11
3 The Opportunity	12
Starting From A Position of Strength	12
Building New Alliances	13
Providing a New Focus in Government	13
Making Meaningful Change	14
4 Recommendations	15
Opportunities for Progress in Government	16
Action Specific to the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security	22
Opportunities for Progress With the Larger Community	23
5 Conclusion	28

6 Appendix I—	
Summary of Recommendations	29
7 Appendix 2—Consultations Conducted.	33
Business	33
Labour	33
Advocacy	33
Other	33
Individuals	34
Government	34

Letter to the Deputy Minister of Social Development and Economic Security

January 8, 2001

Michael Corbeil
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security

Re: Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

In April 2000, the Deputy Minister of Social Development and Economic Security established a special project. The goal of the project was to identify opportunities for people with disabilities to seek employment and to succeed in the labour market. I was asked to lead this project, and this report is the first tangible product of that process.

To carry out this task, I examined various employment-related issues facing persons with disabilities—particularly those receiving disability benefits from the ministry. I gathered information and insights on the barriers they face in seeking employment, and in maintaining it once they have entered or re-entered the labour market.

My approach has been to develop a strong business case for change, as I believe that is what is needed to make progress. I remain optimistic that it is possible to remove barriers and demonstrate to employers and all British Columbians that hiring a person with disabilities makes good sense.

In developing this report, I undertook many meetings both within government, the business community and other organizations. My goal throughout has been to develop a process that could enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to succeed in the labour market. I want to thank everyone who met with me during this process. These people are listed in this report's appendix.

I also appreciate the high level of support, cooperation and patience that was afforded to my staff and me by the employees of the ministry and others who contributed to this report.

Russ Pratt

Assistant Deputy Minister, Special Projects

Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security

I Introduction

About 300,000 working-age British Columbians have a significant disability. Two-thirds of these people consider themselves able and willing to work. (Statistics Canada 1991 Health and Activity Limitations Survey.) Far too many people with disabilities encounter obstacles that make it difficult for them to achieve this goal.

This report seeks to identify opportunities to improve the employment situation of British Columbians with disabilities. It has been prepared as part of a special project under the direction of the Deputy Minister of Social Development and Economic Security.

This project began in April 2000, and involved extensive informal consultations, primarily with employers—the people able to directly create increased employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The initial stage of the project was not intended to include comprehensive consultations with the disability community; such consultation is envisaged as a succeeding step, once government has a clear sense of the opportunities for change. Although this was the initial focus, a significant amount of consultation took place with community groups that requested the opportunity to provide input at this early stage (see Appendix 2).

Why Disability Issues are Important

People with disabilities are one of government's four target equity groups who have experienced consistent and unreasonable barriers to full participation in the labour market and in their communities. For this reason, the B.C. government places a high priority on working with the disability community and other partners to address disability issues.

People with disabilities experience much lower rates of participation in the labour market, higher unemployment and lower incomes than the general population. By addressing the employment situation of people with disabilities, the potential exists to improve all of these measures and—more importantly—to enable persons with disabilities to improve their own lives.

Lasting and meaningful solutions will not be implemented overnight. Progress will be made one step at a time. It is essential that we take a long-term view. This is why this project has focused on a long-term goal:

By the year 2020, every work ready person with a disability will be employed.

This does not mean that progress can only be made in the distant future. It does mean that a big job lies ahead and we need to get started now.

The Government's Eight-Point Plan

Supporting people with disabilities to achieve their greatest possible level of self-sufficiency relates directly to the goals identified by the premier in the B.C. government's eight-point plan. Specifically, the premier outlined the goal of "ensuring everyone is moving forward" and specifically discussed meeting the needs of citizens with disabilities as an example.

The recommendations outlined in this report support the government's eight-point plan.

The Federal-Provincial-Territorial In Unison Process

Along with the development of this report, the B.C. government has been an active participant in federal-provincial-territorial work on a joint national approach to disability issues. This initiative, referred to as the **In Unison** process, started in 1996 when Canada's first ministers identified action on disability issues as a shared priority.

In 1998, Canada's federal-provincial-territorial governments issued a vision document entitled **In Unison**, which set out a common view of the desired future for persons with disabilities in Canada. A follow-up report, designed to set the stage for future action, is due for release in the spring of 2001.

This project is consistent with the vision of **In Unison**. Furthermore, the potential exists for British Columbia to show the same kind of national leadership in addressing disability issues as our province has done in addressing children's issues.

Organization of this Report

There are three main sections to this report:

- The first section (Chapter 2) briefly describes the nature of the challenge faced by people with disabilities, and by governments, employers and other partners who wish to play a role in improving their employment situation.
- The second section (Chapter 3) gives a general sense of the opportunities that exist to bring about positive change, including the refocusing of efforts within government and the building of a broader alliance to address the employment of persons with disabilities.
- The third section (Chapter 4) outlines specific recommendations for change, both within government and in alliance with employers and other partners.

2 The Challenge

Growing Numbers of People With Disabilities Need Financial Assistance

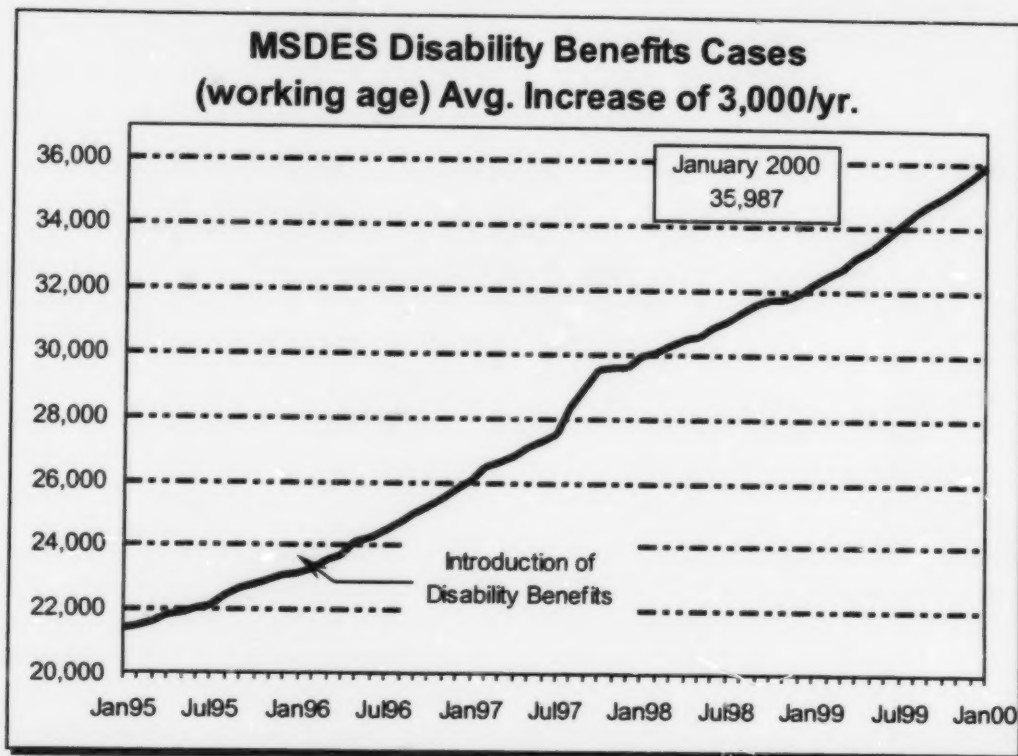
In January 1995, 21,000 British Columbians were receiving disability benefits from the B.C. government. By January of 2000, this number had mushroomed to 36,000—an average growth rate of 3,000 cases a year.

In 1999, the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security provided more than \$300 million in benefits alone for disability benefits program recipients—not including costs in the areas of housing, health and dental services, employment support, transportation or funding from other ministries.

1999:

- 2,200 ICBC disability income recipients
- 39,000 Canada Pension Plan disability recipients
- 85-100,000 Workers' Compensation benefit recipients
- 100,000 private insurance long-term disability recipients

The ministry has estimated that—as things stand—the disability benefits caseload is likely to continue growing by between 2,000 and 3,000 cases per year.



These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the growing numbers of disabled people in British Columbia. Approximately 600,000 people in British Columbia—nearly one in six—have some form of disability. These range from impairments to vision, hearing, speaking and mental ability to disabilities affecting mobility and agility.

In total, it is estimated that between 10 and 15 per cent of British Columbia's two million working age residents are dependent on some form of disability income assistance—provincial, federal, or private.

These numbers are expected to grow as baby boomers get older and the average age of British Columbians increases. Across Canada, those 55 years of age and older are nearly four times as likely to have a disability as those between 35 and 54 years old. (According to Statistics Canada's 1991 Health and Activity Limitations Survey. Actual figures were 14 per cent for the 35-54 age group and 53 per cent for the 55 and older age group.)

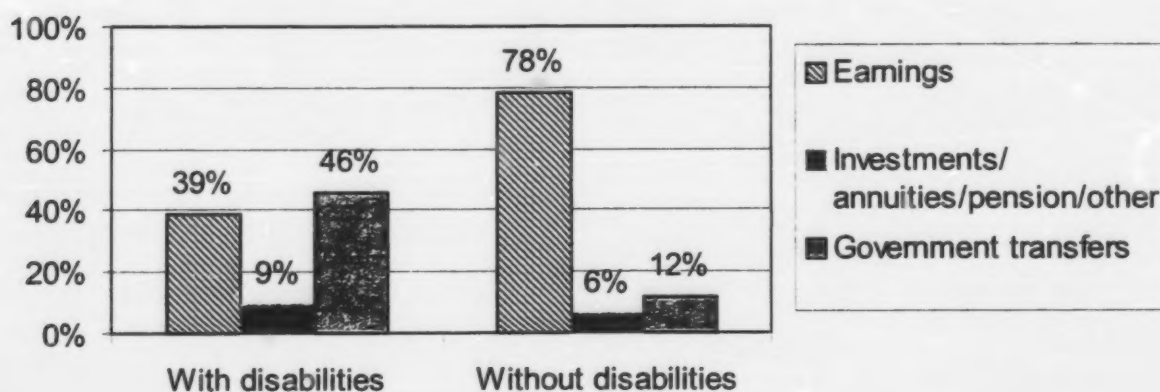
Lack of Labour Market Success

People with disabilities have considerably less success in the labour market than people who do not have disabilities. The statistics are consistent and troubling.

According to the 1996 census, Canadians with disabilities are only half as likely to be in the labour market as those without disabilities. Those who are in the labour market experience unemployment rates of almost double those experienced by people without disabilities.

People with disabilities are far less likely than others to work full-time for the full year, and far more likely to go the entire year without work. They are only half as

Sources of Income 1997



Source: SLID 1997

likely to depend on earnings as their major source of income and they are almost four times as likely to depend on government transfers. (Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, 1997.)

Barriers to Greater Participation

Labour market statistics for persons with disabilities are disturbingly low and support what persons with disabilities have been saying—the way our society deals with disabilities does not support participation in economic and social activities and is leading to a terrible waste of human capital.

While some persons with disabilities are not able to seek employment, many others have the ability, but are blocked by barriers to entering or remaining in the labour market. These barriers begin early on—in our schools and post-secondary education institutions. The difficulty many people with disabilities face in getting the supports they need, combined with attitudinal and systemic barriers, means that people with disabilities, on average, have less education which reduces their chances of employment success.

To succeed in the labour market, persons with disabilities must overcome several barriers:

- Achieve the education and training required for employment.
- Identify and access the disability supports (Disability supports are goods and services that assist people with disabilities in participating fully in daily living. These can range from human supports such as attendant services to technical aids and devices such as wheelchairs, to other supports such as counselling, therapy, and prescription drugs. Some supports are expensive, such as attendant care, while others are much less costly, such as a hearing aid.) they need to find and keep jobs.
- To feel secure entering the labour market with the confidence that help and support will be available if they need it.

Labour Market Participation and Full Citizenship

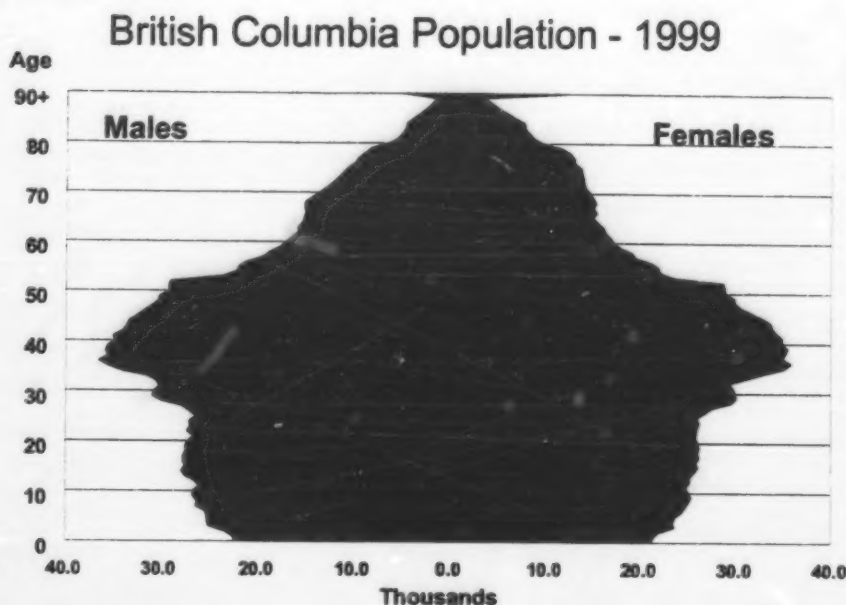
Participation in the labour market offers persons with disabilities the potential for economic benefit, but just as important, it connects people more fully with their communities. Work gives people a sense of purpose and value, it can provide intellectual and social stimulation, and it involves employees with additional levels of community—those provided by co-workers, their employer, others in the area where they work, and the larger community.

E.S. Woolard Jr., Chairman, Du Pont de Nemours and Company has said,

“Du Pont hires people with disabilities because it’s the fair and right thing to do. But it’s also good business. As a group, employees with disabilities have achieved impressive performance levels in our company—and we have studies spanning more than thirty years to prove it. What’s more, these people bring to their jobs an outlook and a perspective that we think enhances the workplace, where diversity is now the norm. We’ll continue to draw on the talents and skills of employees with disabilities in order to meet the future labour shortages and market shifts that industry anticipates. They are unquestionably equal to the task.”

Persons with disabilities stated that they want the same opportunities as other British Columbians, and increased access to employment represents progress toward achieving that goal.

Growing Labour Market Needs



Source: BC Stats

Increased rates of disability due to the ageing of British Columbia's population are expected to emerge at the same time as a growing shortage of skilled workers in British Columbia and across Canada. As members of the baby boom generation begin to retire in large numbers, it is expected that employers will have an increasing need to recruit and retain skilled employees, regardless of whether they have disabilities.

According to labour market estimates, within five years, there will not be enough technically skilled workers in British Columbia to meet the projected demand of employers. By 2010, the number of people retiring in B.C. will outnumber people newly entering the labour market for the first time in the history of our economy.

In the face of this emerging labour shortage, it is even more urgent that our province support people with disabilities to attain the greatest possible participation in the labour market. Persons with disabilities—particularly youth—have the potential to provide a significant and valuable pool of talented, capable workers to help meet the demands of our economy in the future.

3 The Opportunity

We know with certainty that well-trained, adaptable workers will be in high demand to meet the ever-changing opportunities being created by technological change and the global economy. Working together with persons with disabilities and other partners, government can play a positive role in turning these demographic and economic factors to the advantage of people with disabilities, their families, communities and employers.

Government has an opportunity to support persons with disabilities in their efforts to become participants in their communities and in the labour market. We have an opportunity to achieve broader community awareness of and commitment to addressing disability issues. And we have an opportunity to reduce costs to government—not by cutting benefits, but by assisting people with disabilities to achieve their goals.

Starting From A Position of Strength

British Columbia starts this process from a position of strength. Our province has one of Canada's most progressive income support programs for persons with disabilities.

The disability benefits program in British Columbia provides a lifetime disability designation and includes a process for rapid reinstatement of benefits in the event that a person with a disability must leave employment and return to benefits. The program also provides for basic medical benefits when persons with disabilities move into the labour market.

The existing program serves well those who are unable to work. The opportunity exists to build an equally high-quality and effective strategy for people who are ready to move into the labour market.

Building New Alliances

New and strengthened alliances are a key to future success. Persons with disabilities must be key participants in any alliance that is aimed at improving their situation. If success in the labour market is our primary goal, then it's also essential that employers as the people who control job opportunities—are central participants. Organized labour is another key player.

Other participants must include the agencies that provide benefits and supports to people with disabilities: the federal and provincial governments, the Workers' Compensation Board, Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) and private insurers.

The purpose of building new alliances is to cooperatively find ways of increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, while reducing duplication, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, and finding cost savings.

Providing a New Focus in Government

While it is essential that government reach out to build new alliances, government must lead by example. Government programs and responsibilities for disability issues are currently scattered among several different ministries and agencies. This makes it difficult for those outside government to get access to information and programs, and makes it difficult for government to act on disability issues in a coordinated way.

The opportunity exists to more sharply focus government by consolidating responsibility to provide more effective and cost-efficient management of disability issues in government.

Making Meaningful Change

If the aspirations of people with disabilities are to be fulfilled, labour market needs met, and spiralling benefit program costs controlled, then significant change must take place. The opportunity exists to overhaul how government approaches issues surrounding people with disabilities, and how community partners—particularly employers—can become active participants in increasing the employment prospects of persons with disabilities.

While this must happen gradually over time, real, meaningful change is possible and essential. The recommendations that make up most of the remainder of this report are designed to achieve that kind of change.

4 Recommendations

Government, people with disabilities, employers, organized labour, communities and other sectors in British Columbia and Canada have an opportunity to significantly enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The demographic bulge of ageing baby boomers and resulting skills shortage creates an opportunity for people with disabilities to make a breakthrough and achieve much-improved labour market success. To take full advantage of this opportunity, government must take a leadership role within the public service, across the broad public sector and cooperatively with the private and third sectors.

There are opportunities to create strategic alliances with employers and disability rehabilitation organizations. The government can use its purchasing power to influence the development of employment equity plans within businesses they contract with or with whom they have a business relationship.

The following recommendations are organized into three categories:

- those that would require action across government in B.C.;
- those that would require action by the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security; and,
- those that would require action by government in cooperation with other sectors.

Opportunities for Progress in Government

Government Organizational Change

Recommendation 1

All disability programs and operations of the provincial government—and the associated staff positions—should be brought together under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.

The integration of disability programs and other activities would reduce the number of full-time-equivalent staff positions required to manage these activities and would create a more consistent and coordinated approach to dealing with persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 2

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) should be re-profiled with a broadened mandate that reflects the focus on labour market and community participation for persons with disabilities.

The ODI is currently the government's centre for policy development regarding persons with disabilities. It provides all ministries, boards and agencies with advice and policy support on matters relating to persons with disabilities. Government and people with disabilities would benefit from an enhancement of the responsibilities and mandate of the ODI.

Public Service Employment

Recommendation 3

The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, and Public Service Employee Relations Commission (PSERC) should work together, in consultation with the disability community to establish an agreed-upon target for government hiring of persons with disabilities.

According to Statistics Canada's 1991 Health and Activity Limitation Survey, more than 16 per cent of British Columbians have a disability (approximately 640,000 persons). There is no generally agreed-upon figure for the current incidence of disability in British Columbia. However, government has a current target of eight per cent for hiring persons with disabilities in the public service. This target figure needs to be reassessed and agreed to by government and the community. It is important that the chosen figure is accompanied by a full explanation of how it was reached.

Recommendation 4

When government facilities are constructed or renovated or when a lease is renewed, government, through British Columbia Buildings Corporation (BCBC), should ensure wherever possible that each facility is fully accessible to persons with disabilities.

Government is very sensitive about the level of accessibility for its employees and members of the general public, but there are still some worksites that fail to meet the accessibility needs of people with disabilities. In most cases, the cost of ensuring full accessibility is far-outweighed by the benefits.

Recommendation 5

Government, through PSERC, should establish a disability management program dealing with work and non-work disabilities. Government should also adopt the National Institute of Disability Management and Research's "Code of Practice for Disability Management" and incorporate a return-to-work policy for government employees.

Studies have shown that there are great potential savings, in both human and financial terms, associated with establishing strong disability management programs. Government should enhance its own processes and support the establishment and upgrading of disability management in other sectors. A government disability management program could be developed through a partnership with the National Institute of Disability Management and Research. As a preventative measure, government should institute a "wellness program" in its workplaces.

Recommendation 6

Government should initiate a workplace accommodation fund to help remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities in the public service.

By ensuring the availability of needed technical aids, equipment or other accommodations, a major barrier to employment in government will be reduced. The accommodation would remain with employees as they move around within government. The BC Purchasing Commission may be an appropriate choice to manage this fund.

Recommendation 7

Government, through Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC) and with the assistance of the Crown Corporations Secretariat, should mandate public sector employers to implement the recommendations contained in this report.

In parallel with broader discussions outlined in other recommendations, government is in a position to ensure that progress will be made on disability employment issues within a short period of time.

Publicly-Funded Education and Training

Recommendation 8

The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security should work with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training & Technology to develop improved initiatives aimed at facilitating the entry of young people with disabilities into the labour market.

Youth experience a variety of barriers to achieving success in our public education system, and to a successful transition to the labour market or post-secondary education. The 1998 "Outcomes of Former Students with Disabilities" report indicated that students with disabilities perform about the same as students without disabilities; however, they are less likely to be employed. With about 7000 young people between 18 and 30 years of age currently receiving provincial disability benefits, there is a concern that, if these young people do not establish a work history while young, they may have great difficulty moving from income support into the job market.

Cooperative education programs appear to be successful in increasing the participation rate of young people with disabilities to within one per cent of their counterparts without disabilities. Vocational Rehabilitation Services consultants should routinely be present in the public school system to provide advice and to stay closely linked to current trends in the needs of youth with disabilities.

Strategies should include a tracking system to better learn how youth with disabilities fare in post-secondary education and then in the labour market.

Recommendation 9

Government-funded education and training programs should be required to include a minimum percentage of participants with disabilities.

In order to support increased educational achievement by people with disabilities, education, training and certification programs that are funded by government should be required to maintain a minimum enrolment percentage of people with disabilities. This should help to improve general employment success.

Legislative, Regulatory or Program Change

Recommendation 10

Ensure that policy is in place to move RRSPs into trusts, and that the process for making these transfers is straightforward. All disability benefits participants would be so advised.

Currently, a vested pension plan is not considered an asset when a person applies for provincial disability benefits. But a retirement savings in the form of a non-locked-in RRSP is considered to be an asset. In order to ensure consistency and fairness, RRSPs should be placed in a trust when an applicant's eligibility for disability benefits is being assessed.

Recommendation 11

A pilot project should be undertaken to determine the benefits and costs of continuing support payments for disability benefits recipients when they move into employment, until their earnings reach \$35,000 per year, and then phasing out benefits by ten per cent for every \$1,000 of earnings above \$35,000 per year.

One of the main barriers that keep people with disabilities from returning to the labour market is their fear of losing government support and not being able to get it back if they need it in the future. Persons with disabilities should view moving into the labour market as a tremendous opportunity, not as a threat. By undertaking a pilot project to measure the impact of maintaining benefits once a person with disabilities has moved into employment, government will be able to gather data on possible future initiatives.

Recommendation 12

Government should consider during the 2001-02 time frame embedding a return-to-work policy for employees with mental health problems into the employment standards legislation.

Recent media coverage has referred to the massive productivity losses and the immense human suffering that result from mental health problems. Costs will be reduced and worker welfare enhanced if organizations develop or improve ways of identifying these often hidden illnesses. A program run by health-care professionals for identifying employee mental health problems and helping employees deal with these problems could substantially reduce costs.

Recommendation 13

Labour standards should be expanded to include a mandatory employer/employee long-term disability plan. This should be considered during the 2001-02 time frame.

Employers should be required to provide long-term disability coverage to full and part-time employees. The cost of such a plan could be borne by employees and implemented on a cost-shared basis across each industry group. Such a measure would help reduce CPP disability and provincial disability benefits costs. In cases where the employer bears the cost, a long-term disability plan would be a tax-deductible expense.

Action Specific to the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security

Recommendation 14

An Assistant Deputy Minister should be appointed within the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security with a mandate to deal with all disability issues.

A great number of people across government are currently working on disability issues, but there appears to be no clear focus of leadership on these issues. A perception exists that there may be a lack of consistent and efficient management of disability-related activities in government. Having one person with overall responsibility for disability issues would allow for a cost-effective approach to managing these issues across government.

Recommendation 15

The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, the union representing staff, and disability organizations should work together to establish a program that allows ministry employees who work in disability-related programs to work for a short time directly with persons with disabilities.

There would be tremendous value in giving government employees direct knowledge of the situation faced by persons with disabilities. The cost of such a program would be low and the potential benefits are significant.

Recommendation 16

Frontline employees who deal with persons with disabilities and the executive of the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security should participate in disability sensitivity training. Leadership of the union should also be invited to take part.

It is important that all government employees who deal with persons with disabilities and their issues have a real appreciation of the day-to-day challenges facing persons with disabilities. It is through such understanding that customer service is enhanced and progressive ideas are developed.

Opportunities for Progress With the Larger Community

Cooperative Activities

Recommendation 17

A strategic alliance should be formed between the B.C. government, the Workers' Compensation Board, the Insurance Corporation of B.C., Human Resources Development Canada, private insurance long-term disability carriers and community groups. The purpose of this alliance is to create synergies between these organizations to reduce the total cost of vocational rehabilitation.

This alliance would coordinate training, rehabilitation and development programs to meet the needs of employers. The sharing of information and expertise between interested organizations and people with disabilities would help people with disabilities to move from support to work much faster.

With a significant shortage of skilled workers expected in coming years, there is an unparalleled opportunity for persons with disabilities to become employed. Government and employers could provide the alliance with estimates of future worker requirements. The alliance could then determine the number of people required in each job category and begin training and development so each participant can be prepared for future employment success.

For the alliance to accomplish its goals, the expertise of the Office of Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Humans Rights Commission will be valuable in every stage of development through to employment, in order to ensure that there are no conflicts with human rights or privacy provisions.

Recommendation 18

The strategic alliance described in Recommendation 17 should be supplemented by an 'employment arm' that includes employer organizations and focuses on moving job-ready persons with disabilities into employment.

This aspect of the alliance would focus on assisting newly job-ready persons with disabilities to move from benefit programs to employment. A web-based resume centre would assist employers in recruiting workers with disabilities.

By providing assistance with recruitment through the employment arm and web-based resume centre, and access to information on accommodations for persons with disabilities, employers will have a 'one-stop shopping' solution. Employers have indicated that they want such a mechanism to help recruit qualified people with disabilities.

Recommendation 19

Government should convene a round table meeting of private and public sector CEOs, senior human resource personnel, small business and organized labour to consider implementation of this report's recommendations and to discuss potential alternate or additional strategies to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Employers have stated that they are prepared to hire people with disabilities, but often lack the knowledge of how and where to find the appropriate candidates. By convening a round table on this subject, the profile of disability-related employment issues would be raised and constructive solutions could be developed in a cooperative manner.

Recommendation 20

A study should be conducted to determine best practices models in the area of employment for persons with disabilities. This study should encompass both the public and private sectors.

By examining best practices in all sectors, government may develop a model for public and private sector employers to follow. This could lead to reduced costs for employers and increased employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Wide distribution of the results of such a study would help maximize the benefits of the undertaking.

Recommendation 21

Government and other interested agencies should form partnerships with business and service groups, such as Rotary International.

Some major service groups have done extensive work in the field of disability issues and would be strong allies for government and other sectors. Some of these groups have shown interest in partnering to achieve the common goal of enhanced employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 22

Government should provide employers with human rights and privacy advice to ensure they are operating within appropriate guidelines.

Employers have indicated a wish and a need to recruit and train persons with disabilities in an effective and efficient manner. To help them successfully interact with candidates who have disabilities, employers need ready access to human rights and privacy advice and support.

Recommendation 23

Government and public and private sector partners should cooperatively develop and implement a media campaign aimed at raising awareness of employment issues relating to people with disabilities.

By raising public and employer awareness of these issues, commitment to improve the employment situation of people with disabilities will be increased and additional solutions may be developed. Broad-based community support for change is vital to making progress on these issues.

Recommendation 24

Government should work with employers, the third sector and potential workers with disabilities to organize province-wide job fairs specifically aimed at connecting employers and people with disabilities.

These job fairs would be valuable in bringing together employers and potential employees with disabilities. Government could participate on a cost-sharing basis, with ministries and crown corporations sharing the cost of bringing together employers and potential workers with disabilities.

Government Incentives/Assistance to the Employers

Recommendation 25

Government should initiate an accommodation fund to help remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities in the private sector. This fund should also support education and training.

The accommodation fund proposed in Recommendation 6 could be made available to private industry employers to further reduce barriers to recruitment, training and retention. An accommodation training function could also be considered. These measures would help offset the cost of hiring people with disabilities.

Youth with disabilities should have access to accommodations provided through the fund in order to bring them to work ready status. This would require an increased role for VRS consultants in the education system.

Recommendation 26

Government should examine the possibility of establishing a 'gainsharing' plan with employers. Under this plan, employers would receive a portion of disability benefits savings when they hire a recipient and keep that person employed over time.

There is evidence that the SDES partnership with businesses called the Jobs Partnership Program (JPP) pilot project is working. In the United States, a program called Ticket to Work is being implemented; it provides a loose form of gainsharing, where employers share in the savings to government when a person with disabilities moves from benefits to the labour market. By providing this benefit to employers, their concerns about potential extra costs in areas such as disability supports, insurance coverage, sick time and Workers' Compensation expenses would be alleviated. Over time, as the employee becomes established and myths about increased expenses prove false, there will be no need to continue the incentive.

Recommendation 27

The B.C. government should require an equity plan in any organization it makes loans to, enters into contracts with or invests in.

Government can influence its private sector partners by implementing an equity policy that applies to transactions valued above a certain dollar level, perhaps \$1.0 million or higher. The federal government has had a policy of this sort for a number of years.

5 Conclusion

The recommendations included in this report are intended to lay the groundwork for long-term change to the employment situation of persons with disabilities in British Columbia. While most of these recommendations need further study before they will be ready for implementation, I am confident that they provide the basis for a renewed relationship between people with disabilities, employers, government and other community partners.

This strategy is focused on both a reduction in the number of people applying for disability benefits and an increase in the number of people leaving disability benefits as a result of increased access to employment and the resulting increased incomes.

If people with disabilities are supported in their efforts to participate in the labour market, then everyone wins. The next stage of this process will be to bring together the partners to turn these recommendations into tangible and positive change.

6 Appendix I— Summary of Recommendations

1. All disability programs and operations of the provincial government—and the associated staff positions—should be brought together under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.
2. The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) should be re-profiled with a broadened mandate which reflects the focus on labour market and community participation for persons with disabilities.
3. The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security and the Public Service Employee Relations Council should work together, in consultation with the disability community, to establish an agreed-upon target for government hiring of persons with disabilities.
4. When government facilities are constructed or renovated or when a lease is renewed, government, through B.C. Buildings Corporation, should ensure wherever possible that each facility is fully accessible to persons with disabilities.
5. Government, through PSERC, should establish a disability management program dealing with work and non-work disabilities. Government should also adopt the National Institute of Disability Management and Research's "Code of Practice for Disability Management" and incorporate a return-to-work policy for government employees.
6. Government should initiate a workplace accommodation fund to help remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities in the public service.
7. Government, through the Public Sector Employer's Council and with the assistance of the Crown Corporations Secretariat, should mandate public sector employers to implement the recommendations contained in this report.

8. The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security should work with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training & Technology to develop improved initiatives aimed at facilitating the entry of young people with disabilities into the labour market.
9. Government-funded education and training programs should be required to include a minimum percentage of participants with disabilities.
10. Ensure that policy is in place to move RRSPs into trusts, and that the process for making these transfers is straightforward. All disability benefits participants would be so advised.
11. A pilot project should be undertaken to determine the benefits and costs of continuing support payments for disability benefit recipients when they move into employment, until their earnings reach \$35,000 per year, and then phasing out benefits by ten per cent for every \$1,000 of earnings above \$35,000 per year.
12. Government should consider during the 2001-02 time frame embedding a return-to-work policy into employment standards legislation.
13. Labour standards should be expanded to include a mandatory employer/employee long-term disability plan. This should be considered during the 2001-02 time frame.
14. An Assistant Deputy Minister should be appointed within the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security with a mandate to deal with all disability issues.
15. The Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, the union representing staff, and disability organizations should work together to establish a program that allows ministry employees who work in disability-related programs to work for a short time directly with persons with disabilities.

16. Frontline employees who deal with persons with disabilities and the executive of the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security should participate in disability sensitivity training. Leadership of the union should also be invited to take part.
17. A strategic alliance should be formed between the B.C. government, the Workers' Compensation Board, Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, Human Resources Development Canada, private insurance long-term disability carriers and community groups. The purpose of this alliance is to create synergies between these organizations to reduce the total cost of vocational rehabilitation.
18. The strategic alliance described in Recommendation 17 should be supplemented by an 'employment arm' that includes employer organizations and focuses on moving job-ready persons with disabilities into employment.
19. Government should convene a round table meeting of private and public sector CEOs, senior human resource personnel, small business and organized labour to consider implementation of this report's recommendations and to discuss potential alternate or additional strategies to enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
20. A study should be conducted to determine best practices models in the area of employment for persons with disabilities. This study should encompass both the public and private sectors.
21. Government and other interested agencies should form partnerships with business and service groups, such as Rotary International.
22. Government should provide employers with human rights and privacy advice to ensure they are operating within appropriate guidelines.
23. Government and public and private sector partners should cooperatively develop and implement a media campaign aimed at raising awareness of employment issues relating to people with disabilities.

24. Government should work with employers, the third sector and potential workers with disabilities to organize province-wide job fairs specifically aimed at connecting employers and people with disabilities.
25. Government should initiate an accommodation fund to help remove barriers to the recruitment and retention of workers with disabilities in the private sector. This fund should also support education and training.
26. Government should examine the possibility of establishing a 'gainsharing' plan with employers. Under this plan, employers would receive a portion of disability benefits savings when they hire a recipient and keep that person employed over time.
27. The B.C. government should require an equity plan in any organization it makes loans to, enters into contracts with or invests in.

7 Appendix 2—Consultations Conducted

Business:

Business Council of BC
Coalition of BC Businesses
Weyerhaeuser Canada
Hong Kong and Singapore Bank of Canada
Vancouver City Savings Credit Union
Pacific Coast Savings Credit Union

Labour:

BC Federation of Labour
BC Government Employees Union

Advocacy:

BC Paraplegic Assn.
Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Other:

Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers
University College of Northern BC
University of BC
University of Queensland, Australia
University Presidents' Council
University Public Sector Employers' Assn.
BC Lions Society
Canadian Barrier Free Design
Centre for Education Information
Community Social Services Employers' Assn.
National Institute of Disability Management and Research
Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee
Health Sciences Software & Consulting Inc.

IAM Cares
Rotary International

Individuals:

Harry Segal
Sam Sullivan

Government:

Industry, Training and Apprenticeship Commission
Insurance Corporation of BC
Council of Crowns
Crown Corporations Secretariat
Equal Opportunity Secretariat
BC Assessment Authority
BC Buildings Corporation
BC Human Rights Commission
Health Employers Assn. of BC
BC Hydro
Fisheries Renewal BC
Forest Renewal BC
Ministry of Attorney General
Ministry of Community Development, Co-operatives and Volunteers
Ministry of Employment and Investment
Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Labour
Office for Disability Issues
Office for Information and Privacy Commissioner
Provincial Capital Commission
Public Sector Employee Relations Council
Public Sector Employers Council Members
Workers' Compensation Board
Tourism BC
Human Resources Development Canada